

Comparative Analysis of Nature in Eighteenth Century Japanese Painting

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Nature and Artistic Innovation in Eighteenth-Century Japan

During the 18th century, the majority of artists focused on the topics of nature and beauty in their paintings. The theme of 'nature and its beauty was one of the most focused, expressed, and difficult themes of all time. It is because nature is highly diverse, complicated, and comprised of immense variety within it. (Guth)

Among many famous artists of that time, Kano Sokuyo and Maruyama Okyu are also included. Kano Sokuyo was a Japanese artist who was born in 1716 and died at the very young age of twenty in the year 1736. The central theme of most paintings of Sokuyo was nature and its diverse beauty. One of the famous paintings of Sokuyo was created during the 18th century and was titled "Two-panel screen" (egrets and bridge).

The second artist, named Maruyama Okyo, was an Asian artist who was born in the year 1733 and died near the end of the 18th century in 1795. One of Okyo's famous pieces was his painting, "Hanging Scroll" (The Pair of Pheasants). This piece is the work of Okyo during the later part of their life between the period of 1750 to 1795. This great piece of artwork was created by Okyo by utilizing paper, silk, and watercolours. Both of the paintings, the 'Two Panel Screen' and 'Hanging Scroll', share the same base as both are drawn on the topic of nature and its beauty, but they greatly differ in their effect and perception after viewing. (Maruyama Ōkyo)

Comparative Treatment of Landscape and Animal Subjects

The piece of art by Kano is based on nature's outside environment. Tokyo efficiently utilizes both dark, thick lines and softer black lines in the river. It is done to make the viewer feel that water is flowing into the river. Increased care is also taken by the painter to show the fact that there is a definite connection between egrets and their surrounding environment. This purpose is achieved by the artist by drawing short, thin black lines spread in the water of the river and curving around one of the legs of one egret. This stroke is explicitly done to represent the ripple effect of water that would happen if any egret would stand in the flowing river water.

However, Maruyama Okyo does not put much effort into the outside and surrounding environment as compared to Tokyo. The only work done on the outside environment in the painting of Okyo is that the artist had drawn some dark dots or spots of flora to make the viewer perceive that the picture of the pheasants was taken when they were eating. However, there are light shadows drawn near the feet of the rooster pheasant and near the neck region of the female pheasant. There is gradual darkness in the centre of both shadowing areas, which was achieved by making soft and partially hard strokes that have smooth and light edges with dark centres. Though Maruyama had not put much effort into working and connecting the subjects of the painting with the outside environment, he placed increased energy on highlighting the main subjects of the artwork.

The primary focus of Maruyama is to put great effort into the image of two beautiful pheasants in such a way that when a viewer looks at the painting, the attention is not placed on the surrounding environment but on the two beautiful pheasants. For example, if noted, then some notches in the tail feather of the female pheasant can be noted. These notches can be noticed in real birds, and they are the result of folding, itching, or tearing of the feathers. The whole image of the pheasants is drawn by distinctly keeping the image of a real pheasant's appearance in mind. (Metropolitan Museum of Art) The legs of the pheasants are pulled by discrete black lines presenting the actual thin leg appearance of pheasants.

Colour, Composition, and the Representation of Nature

Kayo, on the other hand, does not focus on the image of the main subjects as much as on the background of the painting. Kano has left many places where more focus and attention could have been drawn. For example, in the leaves of the tree, only four to five lines are drawn on the surface of the leaves, which could have been made look more real by adding a few more strokes. Kano uses very accurate details and knows which colours are important and which ones should be used in the painting. He considered a light colour pattern and applied light colours in his painting throughout his piece. He used a dark green shade in the pattern of leaves and combined it with the bright white specks. The result is clear that the green colour stands out more in the painting. In the pattern of fallen trees, Kano used brown colour for the background of the painting, but that does not hold the attention of the viewer away from the presence of egrets in the piece.

For the foot colour of the egret, Kano used a lime green pattern, but the usage of this pattern is so unique that the background environment of the painting does not impact it. Kano also used an orange colour to show the flowers on the side of the stream. He used accurate measurements to choose the colour pattern of the painting, which allowed him to use a few colours. That is why the painting depicts great natural artwork. Kano also added the pattern of gold leaf in the painting, which is used to attract the attention of the viewers. In contrast, the colour of the pattern Maruyama is different from Kano, and he used duller colours in his piece of art. Maruyama's piece portrays that the darker

colours are not suitable for it, and so the choice of the painter was right enough to add a beauty factor to the painting. The male pheasant is based on a dark green colour with the addition of two lighter shades, and these attract the attention of the viewers towards the colour of the neck of the pheasant. The features of the pheasant are green, and the side border is designed with a light green colour. The colour shifted into the golden yellow pattern of feathers, and that is the mixture of two colours brilliantly added to the pattern of feathers. The usage of colours by Maruyama shows that the painter was more focused on the physical essence and the structure of the pheasant.

During the 18th century, Asian artists focused more on their pieces of artwork regarding their colour patterns, and painters added more natural aspects to their paintings. Nature's beauty was captured by two popular artists named Kano Sokuyo and Maruyama Okyo. Kano created his piece, Two Panel Screen, which is based on the artistic pattern of nature. Maruyama created his piece, Hanging Scroll, which portrays the beauty of two pheasants while they are eating. The background of Kano is more detailed, whereas the background of Maruyama is simple. The background of Kano includes the depiction of trees and a stream. Both paintings are based on different patterns and different styles of the artists, but the addition of natural beauty and nature depiction is the same in both pieces. (Guth; Maruyama Ōkyo)

References

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